

A journey of 8.6 million steps

By Debbie Blank, Assistant Editor, Batesville Herald-Tribune

Batesville Primary School teachers used to celebrate Fat Tuesday, which is Mardi Gras, the last day before Lent, with a feast full of calories.

This year was different. Fat Tuesday, Feb. 28, became Healthy Tuesday. A pitch-in lunch marked the culmination of a walking program that was more successful than anyone ever dreamed it would be.

Employees could walk, run, cycle or swim their way to fitness. The goal was for each participant to take 10,000 steps a day. The greater goal was to collectively walk – virtually – from Batesville to San Diego, 2,157 miles away, over last month's 28 days.

Who got the idea for this program? Batesville Community School Corporation's Coordinated School Health Council members "are encouraging the schools to not only be concerned about the students' health, but...to focus on employee health," notes Delilah Sneed, BPS physical education teacher. The BPS Health and Science Power Cycle, a committee made up of Sneed, third-grade teacher Ruth Cochran, second-grade teachers Jane Cochran and Carol McPherson, first-grade teacher Donna Little and student teacher Jessica Beach, came up with the project.

Watching the miles mount up as construction paper steps on the school's hallway walls and a route on one gigantic map in the third-grade hallway "was just an uplift," according to Sneed.

Teri Fledderman's third-graders named the initiative Teacher Trackers, even though all staffers could join in. Fifty-eight of 72 – 81 percent – did. "We walk all day and keep the pedometers on," says the PE teacher.

According to literature from Sportline, walking burns almost as many calories as jogging, eases back pain, lowers blood pressure, reduces heart attack risk, is easy on the joints, slows osteoporosis bone loss and – vital for busy Americans – can be done in short bouts and while traveling. The BPS push coincided with Heart Awareness Month there.

One teacher who helped shape Teacher Trackers understands the benefit. "To be the best person we can be for everyone who needs us, we must get in shape! That means exercise and eat healthy!"

So how did the staffers do? The overachievers reached San Diego Feb. 11. The committee decided to extend the virtual trip up the West Coast to Seattle, then back on U.S. 80 to Batesville, a whopping 5,755 miles. They were able to complete the trip after taking over 8.6 million steps!

Sneed hopes Teacher Trackers is contagious. "Other businesses and groups can do this. We challenge the community!"